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Megan Zandsoltani  
*Seattle University*

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# Women Changing the Face of Sports

Megan Zandsoltani, Staff Reporter

Sarah Thomas made National Football League (NFL) history when she was named one of the eight officials for Super Bowl LV. Starting off as a college football official, Thomas worked her way through the sports industry and began her NFL career as a line judge, improving her eye for the game.

Marking the 35th Annual National Girls and Women in Sports Days (NGWSD), Feb. 3 was a day to celebrate the success of female athletes and the continuing fight for equality for women in sports. There was no better day to celebrate the achievements of women in sports, including Thomas, and others alike.

For Sarah Zhong, a third-year Sports and Exercise Science major on Seattle University's Dance Team, NGWSD was a day to put emphasis on women in sports.

"It was a collective event. Women are important. We are proud, we are strong. As a female athlete you should be proud of yourself. It's a reminder to see how far you have come," Zhong said.

While NGWSD was just one day to celebrate the importance of women in sports, millions of people watched Thomas as she made history officiating Super Bowl LV in Tampa Bay.

For Radio Host of 710 ESPN Seattle, Stacy Rost, seeing Thomas become the first woman to referee the Super Bowl was a pivotal awakening that women, too, are capable of performing at the highest levels in sports.

"First it's excitement, then it's notable. Seeing representation at that level is great to see, but there needs to be more," Rost said.

Super Bowl LV showed young female athletes a glimmer of hope that they can one day be like Thomas. However, one woman making it to the professional level is not enough.

Regie Grady, a third-year Sports and Exercise Science major on Seattle U's Women's Track and Field Team, believes it is about time for women to break the glass ceiling in sports.

"It's shocking and not shocking. The fact that Thomas is the first female referee goes to show how long women in sports have been gatekept," Grady said.

To see Thomas show monumental change was inspiring for women in sports, but it's just the start to something bigger.

Rost believes the call for diversity and inclusion in sports must be recognized. She states the biggest barrier in helping drive the visibility of female athletes stems from institutionalized sexism.



Kim Nukum

"Representation matters. When a young girl sees Thomas and says 'I want to be a referee,' it goes to show that one person matters," Rost said.

Female athletes are at the top of their game, and there needs to be support from every athlete. For Jillian Rasmussen, a third-year Political Science major on the Seattle U Women's Tennis Team, it is not about comparing male sports to women's sports; however, the greater factor behind this is showing up for each other.

"It's important for male athletes to have the same voice they have for women's sports, especially when they are for equality in sports," Rasmussen said.

Not only is it key for male and female athletes to support each other, bringing awareness to the inequality for women in sports is paramount.

"If you are sitting in a room where women are not valued, being able to step up and confront the issue and voice your stance is empowering. Having the ability to be vulnerable with your friends and peers to advocate for women is crucial," Zhong said.

From Thomas to Jen Welter who became NFL's first female coach, women are changing the face of sports. In sports, the behavior of the players is dictated by the environment created by those around them.

"Surrounding myself with motivated people encourages me to be the best athlete I can be. Having a circle of people who work hard pushes me to be better," Zhong said.

Female athletes at Seattle U and around the world are taking their talents to the next level. Uplifting women and young girls in sports, and recognizing how far women in sports have come is encouraging for female athletes.

"Being able to stand up for yourself is a big deal. Athletics is a male dominant world. Being a young girl you don't want to question male dominance. It's important that you do stand up for yourself and not shy away if you have questions or problems," Rasmussen said.

Thomas' historic feat at Super Bowl LV was another step towards inclusivity in the realm of sports. There needs to be a greater acknowledgement towards female athletes' successes and to honor their progress and the continuing struggle for women in sports.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. When you have a minor setback, forgive yourself and move forward," Grady said.

Indeed, Thomas has continued to break gender barriers in sports. Empowering women in sports and advocating for equality and opportunity, she has successfully shown young female athletes that there is nothing too large they can't do.